

Endangered seabird discovered dead by Alaskan gulf fishermen

An endangered short-tailed albatross was discovered dead by fishermen on a halibut long-line east of Middleton Island in the Gulf of Alaska on Oct. 1. The bird had apparently drowned hours earlier when it seized a baited hook as the long-line was being set.

The albatross bore a numbered metal leg band inscribed "Japan" and a red plastic band which were returned to the Bird Migration Research Center of Japan. The young bird had fledged in April of this year off the coast of Japan, approximately 4,000 miles southwest of its Alaskan feeding grounds.

The short-tailed albatross — *Diomedea albatrus* — is one of the rarest of Alaska's seabirds. At present, less than 200 adults of this species breed on a single, small volcanic island, Torishima, near the coast of Japan. The short-tailed albatross is classified as endangered by Japan, and

the U.S. recognizes this designation.

Numbers of the species were reduced to less than 50 between the late 19th century and the 1930's due to commercial harvest on the breeding grounds for feathers and oil. The albatross is now slowly increasing due to complete protection by the Government of Japan, according to research conducted by Mr. Hiroshi Hasegawa of Toho University.

Three albatross species frequent the North Pacific Ocean during part of the year, although all breed in the central Pacific. The short-tailed albatross is the largest with a wingspan of over seven feet; the others are the Laysan and black-footed albatrosses. The short-tailed albatross was once the most abundant of the three species along the Alaskan coast, according to reports by early naturalists; its bones are even common in prehistoric Native middens.